# THE RAGTIME SOCIETY

DEDICATED TO THE PRESERVATION OF CLASSIC RAGTIME

P.O. BOX 8 KING, ONT., CANADA

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Here it is, the end of our first year. By the time this issue gets to you, Christmas will be over, and for some of you New Year's Eve will also be past. Let us belatedly wish you all a Merry Christmas, and we will all look forward to a Happy New Year.

This issue contains quite a bit of policy information about the activities of the Society in the coming year. We have a change in our sheet music arrangements that is covered in detail later in this issue. We also start with this issue our first serial. We have received a delightful four-page article from England, and we will reproduce one page per issue for the next four issues.

Before we go into our regular departments, we would like to mention the renewals of our subscribers. We have been very gratified with the renewals that have come in. We are also gratified with the new members that are steadily joining. We think that some of you who have not renewed, have not done so because you have been too busy with Christmas, etcetera. Now is the time. We hope you will be with us next year. We also hope you will signify same by sending us your $2.00 to renew your subscription to The Ragtime Society News. We would love to have you with us; we hope you want to read our regular emissions throughout 1963. If you do, let us know now.

## PERFORMERS

We hear from many of you that you are watching and enjoying "The Turn of the Century" by Max Morath. Both Max and Bob Darch are tireless workers promoting Ragtime. Our hats are off to them both. As I write this, Bob is leaving Toronto to go to The Escape Hotel in Fort Lauderdale, Florida, for the winter. Max is still doing his college dates. Johnny Maddox is at the Club 76 in Winnipeg. We presume that Wally Rose is still in San Francisco. Ray Rose was at the Gas Lamp in Omaha (thank you Gil Lieberknecht) and may still be. Gil also writes us about Percy Franks. Percy is 70 years old, and plays quite well. Gill thought he was going to Minneapolis. Karl Leaf is still at Shakey's Pizza House in Ventura, California, but with bass instead of banjo accompaniment.

Those of you who know the whereabouts of performers, or new performers who come onto the scene - keep us informed.

PLAYER PIANO ROLLS

Nothing new. Remember, get your hand-cut rolls from Hal Boulware, 996 Keeven Lane, Florissant, Mo., "Classics in Ragtime" label. If you want a perfect copy of Howard Wielmuenster's "Elite Syncopations", write 242 Nancy Place, Ballwin, Mo. Later in this issue we reproduce a picture of Howard and his wife Nancy, that appeared in the St. Louis Post-Dispatch.

PUBLICATIONS

This month we are going to review a publication. Jim Kinnear was kind enough to set down his thoughts on "The Art of Jazz" by Martin T. Williams, as follows:

"We have frequently made reference to 'the bible of ragtime', meaning of course, Blesh and Janis' magnificent compilation "They All Played Ragtime". This work continues to stand alone in its field for thoroughness and completeness. Not so well known perhaps, is a short brilliant section on ragtime contained in "The Art of Jazz", another Evergreen paperback. In this book, which runs 240 pages, the short 20-page section on ragtime, which is remarkably concise and complete, is by Guy Waterman. Not only does Mr. Waterman in our opinion hit the nail right on the head with regard to the nature of ragtime, but he also includes the 24 bar trio of "Magnetic Rag", which itself is unique and particularly descriptive, musically speaking. The article also contains short illustrative examples from Euphonic Sounds, which was a departure from the standard ragtime form, and continued to set Joplin far apart from all other composers. There is also a 10-page section on Jelly Roll Morton and the "Frog-i-more Rag", written by William Russell. For those interested in the ragtime extensions into the 20's, there are also articles on King Oliver's Creole Jazz Band, James P. Johnson, Dixieland, Bix Beiderbecke and Bessie Smith. "The Art of Jazz", (Essays on the Nature and Development of Jazz) $2.00 postpaid from the Society. "They All Played Ragtime", also available - $2.50 postpaid from the Society."

An English subscriber, Brian Bulgin of Birmingham, has loaned us a fascinating magazine entitled "Piano Jazz". This 26-page effort was published in England in 1944. It contains some wonderful articles on jazz pianists. It also contains a delightful four-page article by Charles Wilfod, entitled "Ragtime - An Excavation". In this issue of The Ragtime Society News, we reprint the first page of this article. In succeeding issues we will reprint (one page at a time) the other three pages. We know you will agree that it is an informative article. What you must remember, is that this was written approximately four years before Rudi Blesh and Harriet Janis' fine book "They All Played Ragtime".

We thank Brian Bulgin for loaning this rare book to us to reproduce. If any of you have old articles that you feel all the readers of our newsletter would be interested in, please let us know. We would require the publication for a very short period of time, and would return it in the same condition that we received it.

FROM THE SECRETARY'S DESK

It is hard for Jim Kinnear to submit anything, as his desk is covered thickly with back orders for "Mississippi Rag" and "Swipesy Cake Walk". Jim, Idamay MacInnes and myself, recently spent an evening together going over some problems, and came up with what we hope are solutions. One problem was the length of time it took to send our Newsletter through the mails. Henceforth this is changing, as we will have a new envelope to carry the News, and it will go second class instead of third class mail. Another problem is music backorders. Through circumstances which we won't go into here, we are just printing "Mississippi" and "Swipesy". Thank you all for waiting so patiently, it will never happen again. Jim has a number of excellent comments on the questionnaire we sent out last issue.

"Our 200 questionnaires were sent out with our November Newsletter, and we can only assume that the replies must have been caught up in the Christmas mails. At this date, December 21, we have received back only 15 or so. Not enough really to assess and say that this represents the collective voice of the Society - or does it? We want to hear from at least another 100 of you. It's to your own advantage really. We can put our time and effort into anyone or more of a number of worthy causes, but not all of them at the same time. Your decisions via the questionnaire will determine this. So, send them back to-day, friends."

We continue to read and enjoy the many fine letters that come in over a monthly period. We recently particularly enjoyed a letter from John W. Ripley. Mr. Ripley is the owner of a fabulous collection of song slides of the early 1900's. Those of you who have caught Max Morath, have seen some of these slides. Mr. Ripley writes in part, "I am in the laundry-dry cleaning business. Slides are a hobby. At age 67, due to the Morathian influence,I have started taking piano lessons. Object: Ragtime. I hope I live so long." Mr. Ripley, I hope you do too. I am about at the same stage in piano playing development as you are, and sometimes I hope I live so long. Keep it up - we must triumph, after all there are only 88 keys.

PEOPLE WE HEAR ABOUT

Jim Kinnear submits the following story for this section. Some of you must have information that would be of general interest - send it in. One of our constant complaints is that we could always use more written contributions. Anything that is news we will print (pardon me, New York Times). Here is Jim's story:-

> "A few days after our local newspaper had briefly mentioned the Ragtime Society, my wife told me a lady had called and wished to know more about ragtime. Mrs. Gilham, a graduate of the Royal Conservatory of Music, told me she was teaching piano and voice and that her piano courses had no ragtime at all in them. She explained that she had gone to the music stores in Toronto, had written letters, had searched - all to find ragtime sheet music, and all in vain. Nobody had any, or knew where to obtain it.
>
> When I took her a few sheets of ragtime, she was delighted,

hastening to explain that she thought many of her pupils were ready for it and it was just what they needed. Mrs. Gilham, who is 73 years old, feels that ragtime is just what is required to bridge the gap between the traditional classics and modern music. She also added that she doesn't see much in to-day's musical efforts. We couldn't agree more heartily, and wonder how many other teachers feel that way."

SHEET MUSIC

As we stated earlier, this issue we will get current with previous offerings before we publish anything new. You have all been very understanding about our problems in this area. It is very frustrating to send your money and then wait, and wait, and wait. It is very considerate of you all to have borne with us during this first year. Next year, waiting will be nothing but a memory. We now have enough people taking music that we can predict enough purchases to break even, without asking you to send your money before we print the music.

Our new policy will be this: we will decide what new tunes we will offer, print them, and then announce that we have the music in stock. There will be no waiting. Next month we will announce our new issue. Next year we are going to try to produce "The Smiler" (Wenrich), "Bowery Buck" (Turpin), "Heliotrope Bouquet", "Easy Winners", "The Entertainer", "The Ragtime Dance", "Gladiolus Rag", and "Rose Leaf Rag" (all Joplin), and "Kansas City Rag" (Scott). If you have any particular preference, let us know. If you have any other suggestions on what we should reproduce, let us know that too. Remember, the music must be in the Public Domain (published in 1907 or earlier).

By the time you receive this, we will have available at $1.00 each

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|---|---|
| ORIGINAL RAGS | Scott Joplin |
| ELITE SYNCOPATIONS | Scott Joplin |
| SUNFLOWER SLOW DRAG | Joplin and Hayden |
| FROG LEGS RAG | James Scott |
| ST. LOUIS RAG | (music and cover) Tom Turpin |
| MISSISSIPPI RAG | William Krell |
| SENSATION RAG | (music & cover) Joseph Lamb |
| HARLEM RAG | (music & cover) Tom Turpin |
| SWIPESY CAKE WALK | Joplin and Marshall |
| LIVE WIRE RAG | (music & cover) Adeline Shepherd. |

"The Favorite", Scott Joplin. It is encouraging to see that Perry's in Sedalia, Missouri, have brought out a new and slightly different cover to the one we have known for some time. This one has been redesigned, and is in red. This would seem to mean that sale of the Favorite must be reasonably brisk, which, as we said, is encouraging. Apparently Joplin had approached Perry's on one or two occasions, with some of his manuscripts, which they had rejected for unstated reasons. However, they did accept and publish Favorite, which, while certainly not his best rag, does deserve mention, if for no other reason than it is one of the very few of Joplin's works which contains a triplet. First published in 1904 by Perry's, and still available at 50¢, we have

# RAGTIME — AN EXCAVATION

## By CHARLES WILFORD

RAGTIME AND THE Blues were the two most important of the musical elements that fused to form Jazz. Concerning the Blues much has been written, and there are very many records available; but Ragtime has been left in obscurity, and there are no recorded examples.

For some months I've been trying to do a Corvo on Ragtime: to hunt down and gather together the scattered remains, and get some idea of what the music really was like.

The work 'ragtime' has been so widely misapplied that it now signifies to most people a sort of nebulous compound of the Original Dixieland Jazz Band and Duke Ellington's *Twelfth Street Rag*. To clear these misconceptions, let us set down two defining axioms. Firstly then, ragtime is strictly piano music (as is boogie-woogie) and can neither be sung nor orchestrated. Secondly, the ragtime period coincided roughly with the 1900 to 1910 decade, and no pure ragtime was produced outside this period.

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Until this year (1944) I had never heard a genuine rag. The great majority of other jazz students in England will be in the same position. In America too, if we are to judge from the pathetic attempts to deal with Ragtime in the Jazz Record Book and the other works of the American critics.

To get to hear a rag is in fact a distinctly difficult operation. What is really needed is a pianist with a memory that goes back 30 or 40 years, and sufficient period sense to keep his playing uninfected by tricks absorbed from jazz. Such a man is by no means found in every saloon bar; still less in a rhythm club. And failing this, it is necessary to get hold of a piece of genuine sheet music, and a lesser pianist who can read it with an instinct for the correct beat.

And to find the sheet music is a task of the same order as looking for Gennetts in a junk shop. For ragtime never did reach England, it was never popular music here. In England we skipped the ragtime period; the public's first taste of the new music was when the Original Dixieland Jazz Band were suddenly amongst us. Some copies of the ragtime music sheets were imported automatically by publishers who had blanket agreements with American houses, and it should still be possible to find some of these in the old music shops. But they apparently aroused little interest with the public, and none were published at the time in this country. Even *Maple Leaf Rag*, the most famous of all the rags and still a standard band number, has never been published here.

More recently certain rags have made the grade as 'piano novelties' and found their way into print after a wait of twenty or thirty years. The only ones with which I am acquainted are *Black and White Rag* (1908) by George Botsford, published by Francis, Day and Hunter, and *Temptation Rag* (1909) and *Red Pepper Rag* (1911) by Henry Lodge, published (with a picture of Harry Roy) by Feldman. These are still available, and must therefore form the basis of any collection of rags. It is unfortunate for the good name of the music that they are all rather inferior numbers from the latter end of the ragtime period. They have little melodic interest and little rhythmic variety; each consists for the most part of a single syncopated figure repeated monotonously until the necessary number of bars is filled out. However, they give a good idea of the superficial sound of the music; most successful is the second strain of *Red Pepper*.

As soon as ragtime swept to popularity in America, the Alley composers naturally started in with rags and held up on the Viennese Waltzes and Oriental intermezzos. Large numbers of imitation rags were put in circulation as soon as the boys had grasped the more obvious necessaries of rag form. To quote from the authoritative source of a publisher's blurb of the period: 'No one knows better than we know that a slick vaudeville bunch can project a piece of music onto the market with the force of a catapult, and we also know that three weeks later may find it in the garbage pail.' Such, he hastens to add, is not the piece he is advertising: 'It reveals new thought with each repetition, and five years hence will smother the season's hits one by one as *Maple Leaf* does now.'

Looking through bundles of music of the period, it is often difficult to tell the gold from the dross merely by inspection; the point to watch for is the variety of the rhythms used. Botsford and Lodge seem to be among the better of the class

# OUR OWN ODDITIES

By RALPH GRACZAK

Howard Weilmuenster and his wife Alma HAVE HAND-CUT 80 PLAYER PIANO ROLLS AT 242 NANCY PLACE, BALLWIN, MO.

GRACZAK OCT. 28, 1962

DISCOVERING THAT MANY OF THE OLD RAGTIME TUNES MISSING FROM HIS COLLECTION OF PIANO ROLLS HAD NEVER BEEN MADE FOR PLAYER PIANOS, HE DEVISED A METHOD OF METERING OUT THE MUSIC ON BLANK ROLLS WHICH HIS WIFE CUTS OUT WITH A SMALL KNIFE.—EXPERTS DECLARE THE ROLLS NEAR-PERFECT.

A SIGN PAINTER BY TRADE, HOWARD IS ALSO AN AVID STUDENT OF THE FIVE-STRING BANJO.

—THANKS, MRS. RICHARD LEMASTERS, OF MIDDLETOWN, MO.

it in stock.

"Elite Syncopations" Folio, by Feldman, London. We were disappointed when we finally received a copy of this folio, although it contains "Elite Syncopations", "Bohemia Rag", "Swipesy Cake Walk", "The Peach", and "Cole Smoak". The time of each piece has been altered to 4/4 instead of the traditional 2/4, and the treble has been simplified in most cases to a one finger exercise. We consequently have not ordered any, but if enough of you want it, and are prepared to send us $1.50 and wait several months, we will bring them in.

We expect to have the following commercial sheet music available in early January, at 80¢ each:

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|---|---|
| Scott Joplin's New Rag | (Joplin) |
| Searchlight Rag | (Joplin) |

To those of you who sent us your dollars some time ago for "Sedalia Rag", we say, "Do not give up, all things come to those who wait. We have nothing new to report except to say that we are still working on it."

That's all this issue. Send back those questionnaires when you can. If you haven't renewed, and intend to, do it now. Through the generosity and hard work of Bob Darch, we will print next issue a list of most of the rags and songs of Joseph F. Lamb. The list contains over 130 tunes.

John A. Fisher,
Chairman.